

# JENISON HISTORY

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[www.jenisonhistory.org](http://www.jenisonhistory.org)

JENISON HISTORICAL  
ASSOCIATION  
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## From the Archives

These articles are a regular feature primarily from the files of Virginia Timmer. If you have a topic you would like to contribute (your family stories, etc.) please contact the editor

Our mission is to learn about Jenison history, obtain artifacts relating to its history, and maintain the Jenison Historical Museum as a place to share and display our heritage.

### BENJAMIN SAWTELLE HANCHETT

Article from THE GRAND RAPIDS SPECTATOR, September 20, 1930

#### WHO'S WHO IN GRAND RAPIDS--LXXVI

On a day in 1883 when he was a lad of 14, Ben Hanchett was playing "one old cat" with a group of boys. Andries Bevier, then superintendent of the horse car lines in Grand Rapids, stopped to watch the game while waiting for a car to take him downtown. Ben happened to hear him tell another waiting passenger that he needed an office boy. It was Ben's turn to bat, but he dropped the hickory and ran all the way to the horse car company's office.

"I understand you want an office boy." he said to the superintendent when the latter showed up.

"Where did you hear that?" asked Mr. Bevier, and Ben explained. He was engaged a few days later, and thus

*continued, page 2*



Left: Benjamin Hanchett.

Below Left: Bessie on her wedding day.

Below right: Brownie and Gerald



Hanchett Family



## THEN AND NOW (CONT)

*continued from page 1*  
 began Benjamin S. Hanchett's 37 years' connection with the street railway lines of Grand Rapids, of which for a long period he was president and general manager. During those years there were several consolidations of lines, the cable system was abandoned, electricity superseded horses and the united system became one of the most successful in the country.

### LIFE LONG RESIDENT OF GRAND RAPIDS:

Benjamin Sawtelle Hanchett has lived here all his days. He was born in Grand Rapids October 1, 1868, the son of Benjamin S. Hanchett, Sr., who had come here from New York in 1853 and later became one of the famous captains of steamboats which plied the river between Grand Rapids and Grand Haven. His mother was the youngest daughter of Lemuel Jenison, of the family which gave name to Jenison, and who had taken up lands near Grandville in 1837.

Young Ben attended grammar school here and was in the old high school at Barclay and Lyon when he got the job with the horse car lines. He thought he was doing quite well when he was paid \$30 a month as office boy. He became, in turn, bookkeeper, assistant secretary and secretary, and he stayed on the job when

several cable and horse car lines in the city were purchased by E.W. Clark & Co. of Philadelphia and reorganized as the Grand Rapids Railway company, and when in April, 1900, the Grand Rapids Railway company took over the properties of Consolidated, Mr. Hanchett was secretary and treasurer of this company in 1904 when G. Stuart Johnson, general manager, died. He was chosen general manager then and soon thereafter was promoted to the presidency. He continued as president and general manager of the Grand Rapids Railway company until he retired in 1920.

### BUILT HOLLAND INTERURBAN LINE:

Mr. Hanchett promoted and built the Grand Rapids, Holland and Lake Michigan interurban line, over which first cars ran from Grand Rapids to Holland in September, 1901. This double track line, with a single track extension from Macatawa Park to Saugatuck, became the Grand Rapids, Holland & Chicago railroad by reorganization in 1903. Mr. Hanchett was first president of the corporation. The line was quite successful until motor car competition reduced its revenue and it was forced into receivership in June, 1924, and soon thereafter was taken over by the Michigan

Electric railway, to be eventually abandoned.

In more youthful days Mr. Hanchett came into possession of a large tract of land between Robinson Road and Lake Avenue, bordering in part on Fisk Lake and including the property on which Blodgett Memorial hospital now stands. In 1889 he organized The Country Club, to promote tennis and other sports of the day. The old Amsden home was used for a clubhouse. The Kent Country Club later was organized and built a nine hole course on this property, which it used until it bought the Martin L. Sweet farm on which its present links were constructed. Mr. Hanchett built Lakewood, the fine residence on Fisk Lake, at Wealthy street and Plymouth road, now owned by M.R. Bissell, Jr. He resided there a number of years.

While at the head of the street railway system, Mr. Hanchett developed Ramona Park. On petition of the residents, he served three years as president of the village of East Grand Rapids, 1910-1913.

### REGENT OF STATE UNIVERSITY:

Always prominent in Republican party councils, Mr. Hanchett was a member of the State Central Committee a long time and until

## THEN AND NOW (CONT)

he was elected regent of the University of Michigan in 1910. He was re-elected twice to that position, serving in all 18 years. While a member of the board of regents at Ann Arbor he initiated the Students' Health Service, which now functions so splendidly. He also introduced the Engineering Research Department of the University, which has done so much work of permanent good. He felt that the University should function in the interest of the state's manufacturers, as the Michigan State college at East Lansing functions for benefit of farmers. He also was greatly interested in establishment of the University Extension Department, which brings the University closer to all the people.

Mr. Hanchett was a member of the executive committee of the Republican Publicity association, a national body of outstanding party leaders organized in 1914. Senator Bourne was at the head of this association, and there were only 12 members of the executive committee, a powerful body that functioned for about eight years in national politics.

He was general chairman of Home Coming Week which in August, 1910, celebrated the 60th anniversary of Grand

Rapids as a city. (We have a display of this at the museum.)

## A S FARMER AND DAIRYMAN:

Mr. Hanchett has always been a lover of fine horses, and he has owned some of the best in Grand Rapids.

Since his retirement from active service with the street railway he has spent most of his time on Blissveldt Farms, his 600 acres near Jenison, where he keeps a herd of thoroughbred Holstein-Friesians, and for a while bred Belgian draft horses. His dairy at Blissveldt Farms now produces about 200 gallons of milk a day.

Interested in numerous local business enterprises, Mr. Hanchett was one of the organizers of the Michigan Lithographing company and of the Rose Patch and Label company.

In 1897 Mr. Hanchett married Miss Bessie Husband of Grand Rapids. Their two children are Gerald Jenison, playwright and stage director of national prominence; and Mrs. Venner E. Brace, well known magazine writer and author of two books of poetry for children. The Hanchett city

residence is at 125 College Avenue, S.E.

REMEMBER THE "HONOLULU"? this sketch could not be complete without reference to the "Honolulu," the brilliantly illuminated street car which was in service when Mr. Hanchett was president of the Grand Rapids Railway company. The "Honolulu" was a guest and sight-seeing car. Before the days of the motor car it was used by hundreds of prominent visitors on sight-seeing tours and also conveyed many happy parties of young and old folks on never-to-be-forgotten expeditions.

(Typed word for word from the article by Virginia Piers Timmer)

Ben  
Hanchett Jr.





## Museum Happenings

### October:

Be sure to catch Ken Williams' display on the Interurban.

### December

Christmas Open house is taking shape.

**Watch the calendar on the web for other upcoming events.:**

We look forward to seeing you, and if you would like to volunteer to help at any of these events, please contact the museum at 457-4398 or email us at [info@jenisonhistory.org](mailto:info@jenisonhistory.org).

### Thank You:

THANK YOU!! JHA would like to extend a big thank you to the Four Seasons Garden Club for the beautiful gardens at the Museum.

### Are you a member??

If you are not a dues paying member, please consider joining to help support the Association. Dues are a bargain at only \$10 per year. Contact the JHA at [info@jenisonhistory.org](mailto:info@jenisonhistory.org) or calling the museum 616-457-4398

1800's Bessie Hanchett



## Volunteer Opportunities!!

**Museum Cleaning:** This is a big job, as you can well imagine, that needs constant attention in order to have the museum look it's best during the open houses. Contact any board member if you can lend a few hours.

**Tour Guides:** The school tours are a great way of teaching the children about our history and is such a rewarding experience. You won't regret being a part of this experience for our local children. Joyce

Klawiter would love to hear from you.

**Community Displays:** An initiative is to get some displays out into the community, possible to local banks, schools and businesses. What better way to get awareness out into the community than to bring the museum to them. Grayce Lancaster is heading up this project. She would welcome any help you might be able to offer from finding the locations

to picking display material and setting up the displays.

**And the list goes on...** Monthly Open Houses, Theme's for Open Houses, Inventory, Museum Maintenance, board trustee.

You can come to a monthly meeting or reach out to any board member if you would like to volunteer in any particular area.

## SEPTEMBER OPEN HOUSE

# INTERURBAN RAILROAD

Learn about the path of the Interurban Railroad as it passed thru  
Jenison between Grand Rapids and Holland

SATURDAY, October 15, 2011  
2-4 PM

## FOR SALE AT THE MUSEUM

Jenison Museum Note Pads	\$ 1.50
Stationary with Envelopes	\$ 2.00
Book: Bend in the River	\$15.00
Book: At the Bend	\$ 3.00
Mill Print (unframed)	\$10.00
Jenison at the Bend CD	\$10.00
Historical Prints:	
Large	\$10.00
Small	\$ 7.50

Available during any open house, or call the Museum at  
457-4398

## JHA TRUSTEE'S

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Del South

(##) = year of re-election to the board

**Contact Information:** To reach  
any board member, leave a message at  
457-4398.

### Historical Association of Michigan

Find us on the registry of the Historical  
Society of Michigan  
[www.hsmichigan.org](http://www.hsmichigan.org)

**We are now on Facebook, find us  
at Jenison History Association  
and become a friend.**



Jenison Historical Association  
PO Box 664  
Jenison, MI 49429

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### **2011 Meeting Schedule**

Thursday, September 15 - Georgetown Library

Thursday, October 20 - Georgetown Library

Thursday, November 17 - Georgetown Library

No Meeting in December, 2011

**All meetings begin at 6:45 PM unless noted**

### **2011 Museum Open House Schedule**

September 17 2-4 PM Jenison Then and Now

October 15 2-4 PM Interurban

December 3 1-4 PM Holiday Open House

1st Tuesday of the month April thru November  
10 AM - Noon

Themes posted on web site: [www.jenisonhistory.org](http://www.jenisonhistory.org)

Call to volunteer your time at the open houses